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S E C R E T VATICAN 000516

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [NL](#) [BK](#) [HR](#) [VT](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: DEL PONTE MAKES "'UGLY IMPRESSION"' AT THE VATICAN

REF: HAGUE 2263, 04 VAT 1231

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Political Officer, POL, STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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1. (S/NF) Holy See Balkans Director Maury described to us August 22 the "'undiplomatic behavior"' of ICTY Chief Prosecutor del Ponte on her recent visit to the Vatican foreign ministry (HAGUE 2263). Maury said the Vatican would not respond to the strong letter sent by del Ponte to the pope after the visit, criticizing the Holy See's dealings in the case of accused war criminal Ante Gotovina. Maury insisted that the Vatican had investigated the Gotovina case and did not believe the Franciscans in Herzegovina or Croatia were harboring him. He said the Holy See would not call for Gotovina to be handed over to the Hague, as making that type of public statement would be a matter for the local Church to consider. The Gotovina case aside, Maury said that "'all levels"' of the Vatican were now active in trying to resolve the situation with the Franciscans of Herzegovina, for some time now a thorn in the Vatican's side. The situation is complicated; the Holy See resents the Franciscans holding out against Church authority, but has a keen appreciation for what it sees as their heroic stand in maintaining the Catholic faith for generations against hostile forces. End Summary.

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Visit to the Vatican  
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2. (S/NF) Holy See Balkans Director Monsignor Miguel Maury described to us August 22 the "'very ugly impression"' ICTY Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte made on her recent visit to the Vatican foreign ministry (HAGUE 2263). Though he did not attend the meeting himself as he was on leave, he recounted del Ponte's session with Vatican FM Lajolo and described del Ponte's behavior as very undiplomatic. According to Maury, she came on very strong, certain that accused war criminal Ante Gotovina was being hidden among the Franciscans. She was also abrasive, he said, when pressing for a meeting with Pope Benedict, claiming that Gotovina himself had been granted an audience with Pope John Paul II. (Maury was unaware of any such audience but surmised that if it was true, it was likely that Gotovina had been one of many people typically directed to approach the pope for a handshake or kiss of the ring at the end of a general audience.)

3. (S/NF) It was unclear whether Maury had seen del Ponte's subsequent letter to the pope (HAGUE 2263), but he said her general attitude and behavior had left Holy See officials shaking their heads. "'She showed who she is,"' he concluded. When asked if the pope would respond to the letter, Maury said there was nothing to respond to. "'The pope wouldn't respond in a case like this,"' he said.

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Gotovina Investigation

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14. (S/NF) Maury told us the Vatican took very seriously accusations that Gotovina was being hidden in Franciscan monasteries in Herzegovina or Croatia. Maury insisted that the papal nuncio (ambassador) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) had investigated the situation and concluded that Gotovina was not being hidden by the Franciscans. "Was he there at one time?" Maury asked, "I don't know." "In any case," he continued, "he's not there now." The Gotovina situation aside, Maury told us in a previous meeting that "all levels" of the Vatican were now involved with the question of the Franciscans of Herzegovina. In practice this means a rather complicated assortment of Vatican departments that plays a role in BiH. The Secretariat of State (foreign ministry) is only one, although the most important, player on that front.

15. (C) The Herzegovina Franciscans have been a thorn in the Vatican's side for some time, Maury said, refusing to yield to Church authority on certain issues. Maury said the Vatican was frustrated that they remained in violation of longstanding orders to quit certain of their churches. The Holy See, however, certainly did not want to get the government or law enforcement involved in the dispute. They hoped the Church could handle this internally.

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Public Comments

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16. (C) Maury had no knowledge of any public comment about anti-Catholicism contributing to hesitation on Croatia and the EU (HAGUE 2263). When asked if the Holy See would consider making a public appeal for Gotovina to be turned over to the Hague, Maury said it would not. "It is for the local Church to consider whether to make such a statement," he said. "The Vatican would not make a specific appeal in a case like this."

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Comment

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17. (C) Post had raised the issue of obstructionist Catholic influence in Mostar to several officials here last year including FM Lajolo. Former OSCE Bosnia Chief Beecroft also made his case to the Franciscans and the Vatican foreign ministry (04 VAT 1231). The bottom line at that time: all listeners were sympathetic to us and Beecroft, but the extent to which they were willing or able to engage Bishop Peric of Mostar or the Franciscans was limited. Now Maury is outlining a more active approach by the Vatican, likely a combination of fatigue and incredulity at Franciscan intransigence. Maury told us that the Holy See had learned that one of the Franciscans had (in violation of canon law) presided at a confirmation ceremony recently - and read a forged note of blessing from Pope Benedict XVI.

18. (C) The dynamic here is complicated. The Vatican resents the Franciscans holding out against Church authority, but has a keen appreciation for what it sees as their heroic stand in maintaining the Catholic faith for generations against hostile forces. This sentiment is also reflected in Maury's comments on Bishop Peric. In previous conversations mentioned above with Lajolo, with Maury's predecessor, and others, interlocutors were hesitant to criticize the Mostar bishop, even as they agreed on the need for more forward-looking approaches to reconciliation efforts among Catholics in Mostar. Maury, however, went even further in our conversation, comparing Peric to legendary Catholic figures like Poland's Cardinal Wyszynski and (more controversial -- though beatified) Croatian Cardinal Stepinac, holding their people together in difficult circumstances. We can work with the Vatican on these sensitive issues, but need to tread carefully.

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